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AUTHOR Dantzler, Dolores J.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study were to determine the extent to which basal readers contain stories pertaining to blacks; to find out if the racial implications stated in basal texts are those that blacks want; to locate the black heroes in basal readers and evaluate whether or not these are the preferred heroes of the population of blacks sampled in this study; and to determine whether or not there is an independence of response of the population of blacks sampled in this study according to certain categories such as age, sex, and city. Basal series, grades three, four, five, and six, were reviewed to find stories that would determine the need for this study. One state from each of ten Health, Education and Welfare regions in the continental United States was randomly selected as the representative area. From the state-adopted lists of six of these states, five representative basal reader series were randomly selected: the Sheldon Basic Reading Series, the READ Series, the Ginn Basic Reading Series, the Harper and Row Basic Reading Series, and Lippincott Basic Reading Series. The results indicated that the percentage of stories pertaining to blacks is non-representative of the population, more stories in basals should be written by black authors, and racial incidents were not accurately recorded in four of the five stories. (WR)

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Dr. Dolores J. Dantzler
West Virginia State College
Institute, West Virginia 25112

THE ATTITUDES OF BLACKS TOWARD STORIES IN SELECTED BASAL READERS WHICH CONTAIN NEGRO CHARACTERS

Teaching Black Experiences Through Literature

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INTRODUCTION

It seems to have been taken for granted that blacks reach wholeness and worthiness to the degree that they imitate whites (3). This point of view has no more validity than would the converse, that whites reach wholeness and worthiness to the degree that they imitate blacks.

The attitudes and self-concepts of individuals are determined largely through their home and school environments, and their aspirations are kindled by their heritage from the immediate and distant past. It is, therefore, mandatory that the educational materials with which children work reflect a true picture of their ancestors, otherwise children will form the wrong impressions of the contributions their respective races have made to society.

In order to eradicate the notion that blacks should emulate whites, people, black and white, need to know more about blacks--their heritage, accomplishments, and unrealized possibilities.

It is a generally accepted fact that reading plays an important part in creating an image in the minds of children. With the "proper" kinds of reading, children should not have to search for people of their own color to emulate. All races should be featured carefully, truthfully, and systematically in everything that children are forced to read.

The basal reader is usually required reading and the <u>first textbook</u> the child reads. The use of basal readers is one of the

oldest approaches to reading in the United States. However, it was not until the mid-nineteen sixties, almost one hundred years after the publication of the first basal readers, that the authors who prepared the first multi-ethnic series, the Detroit City Series, realized that textbooks in reading must pertain to the many children who read them regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.

THE PROBLEM

The way blacks have been portrayed in basal readers has likely helped lead to poor self-concepts including feelings of inferiority, feelings of rejection, and feelings of self-hatred on the part of many black children (1).

Blacks, in basal readers, according to content and illustrations, have been seen and continue to be seen in such a way that those who read these books cannot picture the true black image and understand the black experience to its fullest extent. Children must see clearly the works of great Americans in a balanced perspective--explorer with explorer, doctor with doctor, aggressive educator with aggressive educator, revolter with revolter, composer with composer--not a picture of a great white leader with some black menial slave.

Children must be able to see blacks, not as an entire race of people, but as individuals in all walks of life with enough character roles for each and every child to emulate.

Statement of the Problem

The purposes of this study were fourfold:

1. To find the extent to which basal readers contain stories pertaining to blacks,

2. To find whether the racial implications stated in basal texts are those that blacks want,

3. To find the black heroes in basal readers and whether or not these are the preferred heroes of the population of blacks sampled in this study, and

4. To find whether or not there is an independence of response of the population of blacks sampled in this study according to certain categories such as age, sex, and city.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Today, a nation made up of many nationalities of the world, America can ill afford to pretend its black brother is what he pictured him to be in textbooks.

Whites have some difficulty in trying to understand the complexity of the minds of blacks--the human beings that blacks are --when whites have continually been taught the inferiority of blacks; the poor black image to cushion the egos of whites (4). 'James Baldwin has very adequately analyzed this problem as ". . . the refusal of the white to make the psychological adjustments necessary to acknowledge the humanity of the black"' (5).

This study is truly important for it will attack one of the parts of America's oldest and cruelest problems, the color problem (racism) which has at its base an assumption of the inferiority of the Negro.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed revealed that those who have surveyed American school textbooks, basically history, and basal readers, have recognized the limitations of textbooks being used in our school systems of today.

Although changes have been made in textbooks and basal readers, there is a need for the true history of America and the true story of the black American to be told. The question which now arises is:

> How does the black man want to be portrayed in stories in the future?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Basal reader series, grades three, four, five, and six, were reviewed to find stories pertaining to blacks to further determine the need for this study.

Selecting Basal Reader Series

From ten HEW regions in the continental United States, one state from each region was randomly selected as the representative area for this study. These states were California, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, Washington, and West Virginia.

From the state-adopted lists of six of these states, five representative basal reader series were randomly selected:

1. Sheldon Basic Reading Series,
2. The READ Series,
3. Ginn Basic Reading Series,
4. Harper and Row Basic Reading Series, and
5. Lippincott Basic Reading Series

Selecting Representative Basal Reader Stories

Surveying the five randomly selected basal reader series, the researcher first decided on the components of each racial group; White, Black, Other, Mixed, and Miscellaneous.

A survey of the five randomly selected basal reader series revealed the extent of stories which pertained to blacks, the answer to the first purpose of this study.

TABLE II of the study, pages 69-71, revealed that there were five randomly selected series with a total of 702 stories, 37 of which pertained to blacks.

TABLE II

Series	Stories in Series	Number of Stories Pertaining to Blacks	Percent (%)
Allyn and Bacon (Sheldon Basic Reading Series)	128	8	6
American Book Company (READ Series)	149	8	5
Ginn Basic Reading Series	148	13	9
Harper and Row Basic Reading Series	170	2	1
Lippincott Basic Reading Series	107	6	5
	702	37	5

Of the five series examined, the Ginn Series was the only series with a significant number of stories pertaining to blacks.

The five representative stories randomly selected were:

1. "A Man Who Looked Ahead," Sheldon Basic Reading Series, Grade 6.
2. "Bill Cosby at School," Lippincott Basic Reading Series, Grade 6.
3. "Colonial Poet," Sheldon Basic Reading Series, Grade 3, and
4. "Harriet and the Promised Land," Ginn Series, Grade 4.

These five stories were reproduced with the permission of the publishing companies, the original copyrighters, and those who originally produced photographs in two of the stories.

Instrument Used to Collect Data--Questionnaire

A questionnaire was devised by the investigator concerning characters in the story, plot or theme, treatment or development of the theme, and famous Black Americans. The questionnaire required, primarily, a yes, no, sometimes, undecided type of response. Five questions required original responses.

Selecting Respondents for the Questionnaire

Difficulty in finding the names of black participants in the different geographical areas and the fact that the black church is universal, made up of people of varying backgrounds, led to the decision to secure black participants from the churches in the ten different randomly selected HEW states.

Collecting Data

Questionnaires pertaining to blacks in basal reader stories were administered, in person by the researcher, in these ten states. Eighty percent (320) of the respondents participated. Each respondent read one of the five randomly selected stories and answered a questionnaire pertaining to that story.

Analysis of Data

To answer the last three purposes of this study, it was necessary to analyze data pertaining to the questionnaires and the basal reader stories. The data were descriptively and statistically analyzed through the use of the West Virginia University Computer Center, Morgantown, West Virginia.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The percentage of stories pertaining to blacks is non-representative of the population in the United States where 11% of the population is black.
2. The respondents, seventy-eight percent, very significantly (.01) agreed that there are black heroes they would like included in stories children see and/or read.
3. Three-hundred six (96%) chose, from a list of seventy selected Famous Black Americans, names of blacks they would like to see in basal reader stories.
4. They very significantly (.01) thought racial incidents were not accurately recorded in four of the five stories used in this study.

5. At the .05 and .01 levels of significance, they agreed that a black author would have written four of the five stories differently.
6. They, 91%, very significantly (.01) agreed they would like to see and/or read more stories in basal readers written by black authors.
7. They significantly (.05) agreed a black illustrator would have drawn or painted the pictures differently.
8. Statistically significant responses were related to those who were 31 to 50 years of age, females, those living in all the cities except Atlanta, Georgia, and more related to those from Los Angeles, California, than to any other location's respondents. The respondents were married with one or no children. Those with children who had significant responses had their oldest and/or youngest child in the age category of (through 11). The respondents were basically high school and college graduates with occupations ranging from highly professional to manual and service workers. The fathers' occupations of those significantly related to the responses ranged from not listed or deceased or highly professional to manual and service workers. The mothers' occupations were either not listed, listed as deceased, housewife or service worker. The respondents belonged to black-oriented and school-oriented organizations.

9. There were five questions to which the respondents gave written responses. The question to which the most responses were given was:

   "What would you most like to see stressed in stories about blacks?"

   Two hundred forty-six (246) respondents, 76 percent, very significantly (.01) answered this question with many different responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study of the stories in basal readers which pertain to blacks, this researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Basal reader publishers should take into consideration what the respondents have stated they would like to see in basal reader stories and begin to make the necessary changes in basal reader series.
2. Institutions of higher learning should offer in-service training to faculty in order that university and college professors may learn about blacks and their contributions to our American society.
3. State Departments of Education, as the Michigan State Department of Education has been doing, should:
   a. Determine guidelines for surveying and selecting school textbooks.
   b. Work with publishing companies to improve textbooks.
   c. Recommend courses of action for the local boards of education and teacher-education institutions.

4. School officials should analyze and develop their attitudes toward blacks to the extent that:
   a. They become familiar with the history of blacks.
   b. They are capable of communicating in terms of blackness.
   c. They are capable of analyzing accurate and/or racist content.
5. Those who select basal readers for school systems should make sure basal reader series meet certain criteria:
   a. Stories, pertaining to blacks, should be comparable to the percentage of blacks in America.
   b. Stories should be written and illustrated by black and white authors and illustrators who have taken a moral stand and discussed racial discrimination.
   c. Black portrayal of heroes should be based on how well the heroes are liked by blacks and what these heroes did to aid our society.
   d. Blacks should be portrayed in varying roles.
6. Future studies need to be done to:
   a. Update this study.
   b. Determine those basal reader series which most adequately portray blacks.
   c. Determine which State Departments of Education are using basal reader series which adequately portray blacks.

CONCLUSION

If "Color" problems were and are encountered in the United States, children should understand that this, too, is a part of our society, for:

> . . . The search for truth is never-ending but the way to begin is to be willing to seek it. . . . (2).

Stories should tell of the problems blacks, who rose to success, have had concerning their color.

To tell the true background of any successful Black American is to tell of the problems he encountered because of his color, and how he overcame these difficulties while working within the framework of our system and attaining his goal at the same time.

Children can then understand our society and what they must do to become successful in it. They can understand how to function in our society and why, in many instances, a black character was treated a certain way. They can begin to think critically about our society since critical thinking is one important aspect of reading comprehension.

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